



[H]Institute

Your Story Matters - Lesson 7 Notes Stewarding Stories: An Introduction

My story: audio recording

During these 3 lessons we'll take a look at how the theological and philosophical foundations of story work that we've previously considered with AM, can be applied in our contexts via the particular methods and practices we utilize. We'll be giving careful thought to how we can **steward our stories as servants rather than bearing them as masters** who control and weigh us down.

"Many of our memories don't surface easily or right away. Sometimes a present event triggers them. Sometimes a crisis of soul brings them out of hiding. They serve our soul development, but they are servants who live deep in the basement or way up in the attic." @ Vinita Hampton Wright, p. 96

I. Identity

A. Stories give us cues about our identity

Think about cultural narratives that have been passed down from one generation to the next. These stories, while incomplete or disjointed in many ways, provide context for how you became who you are today. The Israelites were frequently modeling this concept, as each generation provided, for good and for bad, some cues about their identity as a people based on the narratives that were passed along to each upcoming generation.

B. Stories do not define our identity

Stories can shape, guide, form, etc., but they do not have the final word. They are a part of our identity, but they are not all of it, and certainly are not the core of it. This is where we sometimes get tripped up on the ways our cognitive (biblical truth) beliefs don't match with our deep beliefs. Because our cognitive beliefs have been **taught** (for believers, based on biblical truth), but our deep beliefs are **caught** (watching other people, especially our parents or primary caregivers during developmental years) and bought in painful experiences — STORIES —; we can be *"living lives that violate our sincerely held beliefs and convictions because we have never confronted and disarmed the power of these personal deep beliefs."* [Identity being a big one!] @ Nathan Shattuck → So we may live by what we've caught and bought, rather than what we've been taught. We live as a prisoner of bitterness or rage, resistant to joy, one who wears the garments of shame, disoriented or numbed; rather than living as the one God delights in, sings over, the one kept by a keeping God, the one who is pure and lovely, made holy and righteous, a joint heir and sister of Christ himself, one who will be seated in the heavenly places and who has access to the riches of God's kingdom.



[H]Institute

Your Story Matters - Lesson 7 Notes Stewarding Stories: An Introduction

C. Stories honor our identity as image-bearers of God

Part of our image-bearing, a characteristic of being an image-bearer, is to be a story-teller. God is the ultimate story-teller and he has fashioned us after himself, which tells us that at our core we are inclined to experience our lives as a series of stories set within our entire *history*. In our finite/limited/fallen state, we'll always experience the remaining impacts and tendencies toward centering the story around self (or trauma), but that doesn't mean we dismiss, discount, or bypass the beauty of the story. To name, to describe, to say "this is what happened," or "this has shaped me," is an act of declaring that beauty can and does exist even in the darkest of settings.

A vital part of establishing truth happens when we do story work, most importantly, truths about identity, sin/evil, justice, and redemption. Much of one's identity can be disrupted, manipulated, deceived, by abuse and trauma. Greg Wilson and Beth Broom talk about abuse as the desecration of the image of God. We come to believe things about ourselves that are not accurate, not keeping in step with what God has said about us. Identity can be sorted and reoriented as we engage with our stories. The opposite of being desecrated is to be honored. When we walk with others in story work, we bestow honor. It is a sacred work.

Example: In my story, I can see how aspects of my identity were shaped and formed, twisted and harmed, by this pastor (and the others who allowed his behaviors to continue unchecked for over a decade). How has my story work granted me honor? Being seen/known/heard, particularly by men who have shown me honor. I know firsthand, exactly as Diane Langberg and so many others have said, that our healing comes in part, as we tell our stories in the safe presence of others and gain new experiences that begin to establish new stories.



[H]Institute

Your Story Matters - Lesson 7 Notes Stewarding Stories: An Introduction

II. Purpose

A. “Pain has a purpose” v. the meaning of our memory

If you recall from Ann Maree’s first lesson, one of the purposes of story work is to preserve right-mindedness, to reshape our inner man, to work out our salvation in a sense. As we’ve noted, this doesn’t imply that pain is something to hold up as a special form of holiness. We sometimes lean that way because we want to know that our suffering was “worth it.” One of the most frustrating and disheartening things about using language such as “pain has a purpose” is that it (perhaps unintentionally) sets up profound suffering as a worthwhile experience based on an overrealized or overly simplistic view of holiness; rather than looking at our stories as evidence that we exist in a broken world and as opportunities to extract meaning from our memory — memory that exists uniquely to us as humans. Meaning is more of a subjective thing, where significance and perspective can vary from person to person and memory to memory. We remember details, we carry around in our senses the sorrows of our suffering because of our uniquely intricate created design. Now, we can talk more about who gets to assign that meaning to our stories, or who has the authority to give meaning. “Tears in a bottle” — how would that be possible or even relevant to include in scripture if we weren’t saying that those stories have meaning? He counts, records, takes note of... there is great meaning/significance in how God holds those memories so that I don’t have to convince myself that they have a particular purpose.

B. Recognition: the fruit of contemplation

A primary purpose of revisiting or remembering our stories is that this practice can help us live in the present. We become more able to recognize the time in which we currently exist and live. “Recognition is the **fruit of** contemplation.” — Smith, p. Xiii

Recognizing how this story “shows up” in my present realities has become a skill, something I began noticing (holy noticing), and then engaging with rather than pushing away (learning to ID the tendencies I had learned — apologizing all the time, giving caveats, assuming I was wrong every time, timidity, not being assertive or exercising my true gifts in my vocation; and finally, began actively seeking to change those patterns and habits to move toward a re-membered identity and confidence in who God created me to be and the particular ways he has called me to serve him.

This recognition, as we come to it increasingly so, can help us differentiate between what was and what is.



[H]Institute

Your Story Matters - Lesson 7 Notes Stewarding Stories: An Introduction

C. Senses stored and re-stored

Stories are tied to our senses. *“A memory is often connected to us in more than one way, and so the memory can be lifted into conscious light through some event or sensation when we aren’t even looking for the memory.”* (Wright, p. 95)

My story: tone of voice, cologne scent, clean cut men / preacher boys, worship song “what worthless worms are we,” when a man ascends to the pulpit, when the term “shepherd” is spoken (even rightly), church membership documents → These are all aspects of the senses being stirred.

III. Wise Warnings

These are important considerations for us as we walk alongside the one who shares her story with us, or as we carefully tend to our own stories.

A. Recognizing threats

“Using” them as a lesson or sensationalizing them
Remaining under their power

B. Keeping time

Stewarding our stories wisely and carefully means we are able to put our stories in their proper place and time, while guiding us to dwell in the here and now.

dyschronometria, an inability to keep time — Smith, p. 4

C. Looking, but not seeing.

“Observing is something Mary did throughout her life as she found herself in unbelievable realities. To observe is to take notice. She remained present.” — Jessica Herberger [See pp. 20-22 of *Peace in the Dark*]

Example: conversation with a counselee recently about how she does not feel integrated as a person; speaks of her story as a set of facts, something to recite. “I have this belief that my story is toxic to the listener. I’m showing you the recording. You (we) aren’t meant to look at those things.” – But if we don’t look, we won’t see you!



[H]Institute

Your Story Matters - Lesson 7 Notes Stewarding Stories: An Introduction

D. Lacking goals

What are some potential goals or aims in story work?

- Dispel or quiet the shame (keep eye contact, giving language)
- Gain clarity, like AM has shared, we can consider our memory [rightly, accurately]
- Someone to bear witness, affirms to us that we aren't alone in the pain of it
- Reminds ourselves that it really did happen

E. Knowing your role

- Witness — bringing your presence to bear in the midst of memory, as if you were there as it happened; again, this strengthens the reality of one's experience In scripture, witnesses strengthened the reality of Jesus' birth, life, ministry, death, burial, and resurrection; testifying to the greatest story.
<https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/martus-witness>
- Companion — fellow traveler, person employed to accompany another
- Midwife — trained to assist in the birth/arrival of life
- Shepherd — person who moves and cares for the sheep, tends, supports, protects (we'll talk about this more in our final week, "Embodying Jesus")



[H]Institute

Your Story Matters - Lesson 7 Notes Stewarding Stories: An Introduction

Closing Prayer:

Living God, author of my life and story, I come to you and call your writing of me, my body, heart, mind, spirit, and will — good, beautiful, and holy. You made me with delight and precision. You crafted my nose, my eyes, and my arms. You made my hands and feet. You are the very energy of my body, the deepest presence in my being. And I praise you, love you, and trust you and your creation.

Jesus, I also confess that I have often ignored my story, denied it, or rewrote it to not read as it does. I confess that I am in a story war and that there are many stories that are unresolved. I am confused and hurt. Angry. Maybe even bitter. Most of all, I confess it is easier to be lukewarm about my past than to engage it with

Spirit of God breathe life into my memory. You are the One who calls forth memory and teaches me how to bring the death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus into my daily life. Breathe life into me. Breathe courage into me to face where I have been blessed and where I have been cursed. Use my story to reveal the story of Jesus. Use the revelation of Jesus to take me deeper into the stories of others.

Glorious Trinity, I submit my heart, mind, soul, spirit, and will to you to receive from you all that you desire as I move into what you want to reveal. My heart is open. I am ready to do this work in your

I pray all this in the powerful name of Jesus of Nazareth. Amen.

@ Dan Allender